

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 660

By Kyle

A RESOLUTION to join in celebrating the Shelby County
Courthouse Centennial.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly pause to specially recognize those venerable public buildings and structures that have become integral to the State's collective identity and cultural heritage; and

WHEREAS, one such building is the Shelby County Courthouse; on October 15, 2009, the Memphis Bar Association and other legal organizations, Memphis Heritage, and the government of Shelby County will jointly host the Shelby County Courthouse Centennial, a celebration of the building and the history and high ideals it has come to symbolize; and

WHEREAS, plans for the event include displays of historical items pertaining to the construction of the Courthouse and many of the significant events that have occurred within its walls; members of the Bar History Committee have been working with local and state museum curators to collect documents and other items that will illuminate the building's past; and

WHEREAS, the Memphis Bar Auxiliary will reorganize its Courthouse tours, and the Memphis Film Commission is gathering photographs of the building, as well as stills from the many movies that have been filmed there; and

WHEREAS, a number of state and local community leaders have been invited to participate in the event, and the organizers intend the celebration to be for the entire community, not simply the Shelby County legal community; and

WHEREAS, the Courthouse Centennial coincides with the Annual Conference of the National Association of Women Judges, so over 250 judges from across the nation will be in Memphis the week of the celebration; a special Centennial event has been scheduled for the

conference attendees, allowing organizers to showcase one of the most magnificent public buildings in the United States to a national audience; and

WHEREAS, Centennial participants will find a beautifully restored building steeped in the rich history of Tennessee and the U.S. South; the grandeur of the Courthouse will undoubtedly captivate even those who lack any historical curiosity; and

WHEREAS, located at 140 Adams Avenue, the Shelby County Courthouse occupies an entire city block in the heart of downtown Memphis; and

WHEREAS, the Neo-classical Revival-style structure was designed by James Gamble Rodgers, who was one of the nation's leading architects at the turn of the century; a dedication ceremony was held on January 1, 1910, shortly after the building was completed in late 1909; and

WHEREAS, to reflect the natural beauty of the State, Mr. Rodgers selected Tennessee blue limestone for the exterior of the building; six massive sculptures, depicting Authority, Justice, Liberty, Peace, Prosperity, and Wisdom, flank the main entrance, three on either side, and these were cut from whole blocks of Tennessee white marble; and

WHEREAS, the interior of the Courthouse is a magnificent mixture of mahogany and veined marble replete with fine details, from the brass doorknobs that include the Shelby County seal to the banisters and spindles trimmed in gold leaf; and

WHEREAS, in 1904, the Shelby County Quarterly Court decided that the people of Shelby County deserved a new Courthouse; their current quarters, built in 1859 as a hotel, had become "actually irksome"; and

WHEREAS, the Court would have to petition the Tennessee General Assembly twice to issue bonds for the project, and thanks to the foresight of a progressive legislature, both bond issues were approved, generating the necessary funds for the construction of a grand, new Shelby County Courthouse; and

WHEREAS, since the original dedication of the Courthouse on New Years Day 1910, the Courthouse has undergone various additions and modifications, some not so salutary; in the 1970s, for instance, an attempt to clean the exterior caused severe damage to the limestone façade and the marble statues; and

WHEREAS, in 1980, though, the Courthouse was placed on the National Register of Historic Places and designated as a significant architectural and historical site in the Adams Avenue Historic District; a series of renovations ensued, and by 1992 the building had not only been modernized to meet contemporary standards of safety and comfort, but also restored to the state of beauty its designer, James Gamble Rodgers, had envisioned all those decades ago; and

WHEREAS, today, the Shelby County Courthouse most certainly serves the purpose for which it was originally designed: to provide a space for the administration of justice; in addition, thanks to much care and attention, it also serves as a repository of State and Shelby County history; and

WHEREAS, it is of the utmost importance that, when an occasion such as the Shelby County Courthouse Centennial arises, the people of this State grasp the opportunity to celebrate their collective history and the culture of Tennessee; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we hereby join in celebrating the Shelby County Courthouse Centennial, an event that commemorates the dedication one hundred years ago of a vital Tennessee historical landmark, and thank the event's organizers and participants for their prodigious efforts to preserve and share the cultural heritage of this State.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.